

## **“Play Ball” – The *Women’s* Way**

Lydia Bruegge

*All Saints Academy, St. Breese*

*Teacher: Stephanie Garcia*

They showed bravery, endurance, and heart; they represented the women of America. Showing, immense courage, on and off the field, these brave women acted as warriors, fighting a battle every game they played. They were not only role models, but the Rockford Peaches baseball team represented the hopes and dreams that women could attain success.

When Philip Wrigley created the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) in 1943, many doubted the league would even last a year. But these women silenced doubters by playing an amazing eleven years of hardball.

In 1943, just two years before WWII ended, most men in America had already been shipped out and were defending their country. But it became apparent to Phillip Wrigley his once fan-filled stadium became nothing but lonely seats beckoning for company. With his profits dwindling, Mr. Wrigley knew he needed to do something to attract fans to the stadium. Since the war started, women were replacing the men in the workspace, why not replace them on the field as well? With that thought, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was born. Tryouts were held, and four of the greatest teams to ever play were formed: the Racine Belles, Kenosha Comets, South Bend Blue Sox, and of course the remarkable Rockford Peaches. Nevertheless, obtaining this great privilege of being some of the first women to play professional baseball came with uncomfortable consequences. The women were forced to wear "short-skirted wool dresses-in pastel colors-over heavy, cotton boxer shorts. The shorts, knee-high socks, and a hat would compliment the dresses." It was very important to owner Wrigley that players always appear feminine on and off the field. The players even had to attend charm schools to perfect their manners.

The Rockford Peaches revolutionized the AAGPBL forever. They won more league championships than any other team in the history of the league; the first was in 1945, and the other three were won consecutively in 1948, 1949, and 1950. But winning did not come easily. It meant, an immense amount of hard work and dedication. In the 1943 season all teams were closing in on first place, except the Peaches. They were a disastrous sixteen games away, and very much out of the running. It was not until 1944 that the Peaches really

became competitive when they changed managers. Even though they finished fourth, they improved markedly, and received a great deal of hope and inspiration from their fans. In fact, at the Peaches last home game, 3,133 brave fans filled the Rockford stadium, or as sports writers referred to it as: "The Peach Orchard". The fans loyalty never wavered, for they witnessed Carolyn Morris, the Peaches pitcher, pitch a nine inning, no hitter against the Blue Sox that night.

By 1944 the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League had expanded to ten teams. As more teams were formed, games became more intense. But even though the league was expanding, the Peaches were going nowhere. After they won the 1950 league championship, all of the work they put into becoming the powerhouses they were, was soon lost. They were once again the team that worked so hard but was "not to be". Many of their great players, after their last championship was won, had decided to move on to the college life, including the greatest player to ever play for the Peaches or for that fact, in AAGPBL: Dorothy (Dottie) Kamenshek. Dottie was, in the words of the *Rockford Star* on August 20, 1950, "a girl baseball star who has been called one of the greatest defensive first basemen-man or woman-of all time, who has been honored by sports writers all over the nation, and whose diamond service have been sought by professional baseball..." Dottie Kamenshek was a small town girl, but a big time player who shone upon the entire league, as the greatest first basemen of all time. In fact, Wally Pip, first basemen for the New York Yankees, called her, "the fanciest fielding first basemen I've ever seen- man or women." She was the first woman asked to play professional baseball with men, but declined the history making offer. Dottie won hitting titles in 1946 and 1947, and was selected for seven All-star teams in her ten-year career for the Peaches.

Since 1954, there has yet to be another professional baseball team for women. Ever since the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was created, a new door was opened for women. The league not only set guidelines for women's baseball and softball players around the world, but proved that even the most impossible dreams can be reached if one is willing. [From Barbara Gregorich, *Women at play*; Susan E. Johnson, *When women played hardball*; Margot Fortunato Galt, *Up to the Plate: the All American Girls Professional Bseball League*; P.A.V. Studios, (1999) "all All-American Girls Professional Baseball League 1943-1945," [www.aaglpbl.org/roster/rost\\_k1#kamenshek](http://www.aaglpbl.org/roster/rost_k1#kamenshek) (Jan. 6, 2004).]

